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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the effectiveness of the University of North London's Early Childhood Studies Scheme (ECSS), exploring student characteristics and how its YC100 Study Skills module addressed students' needs. The module empowers nontraditional ECSS students by building a self-confidence and skills infrastructure that teaches them how to study, learn, and communicate in school. Five students participated in the study. They identified need for self-development and improvement as the reason for attending. Students were taught six key components: good students are made, not born; getting the overview is essential; creativity is vital, and it can be taught; knowledge of academic forms or genres eases anxiety and promotes success; fear plays an enormous role and must be actively addressed; and reflexivity is vital. The five students completed interviews examining their: goals; feelings about study and themselves as students; experiences with ECSS; experiences with the study skills module; experiences with support; and recommendations. Students had clear goals for themselves but were anxious and fearful. They reported positive experiences with the ECSS and gave the YC100 module very positive feedback. Most students were not aware of other university support available. Recommendations emphasized better communication, including more formative feedback. (SM)

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Abstract

Many Higher Education institutions are currently following a widening participation brief, how best should the HE environment adapt to cater for the needs of the increasing numbers of non-traditional students being enrolled? This paper places the University of North London's Early Childhood Studies Scheme within the wider institutional context, exploring the nature of the Scheme's students and how its YC100 Study Skills module attempts to address the needs of ECSS students. YC100 is explored in some detail and the study undertaken is reported on with a special emphasis on student goals, their experiences of ECSS, of YC100 and of University wide support, and student recommendations as to how their needs could be better met.

Background

Early Childhood Studies Scheme

The Early Childhood Studies Scheme (ECSS) supports diversity in its very nature being, as it is, open entry and multi-mode (direct tuition or distance learning). Students need have no formal or traditional educational qualifications to be offered a place; the only prerequisite is that they have worked with children for three years. In this way the ECSS recruits a broad spectrum of students, including a very high proportion of 'non-traditional' students.

It could be argued that the tacit assumption accompanying the traditional A' level route into Higher Education is that A' level, or traditional students, alongside subject content, have almost subliminally acquired the skills and strategies, the 'skills infrastructure', necessary for coping with formal HE study. (Anecdotal evidence from many university lecturers at this time indicates a growing belief that even traditional students are not acquiring such a 'skills infrastructure' any more, but that is the basis of another paper.)

The YC100 module is designed to build a skills infrastructure in the ECSS non-traditional student by teaching them how to study, learn and communicate in the academic environment.

Institutional context

The University of North London has a 'widening participation' brief and actively recruits those that would be deemed non-traditional students. This is not an homogenous group but consists of:

- mature students
- English Speakers of Other Languages
- those typically excluded from or not encouraged into Higher Education (HE)
- those from the local working class and ethnic minority communities.

Non-traditional students may have had insufficient experience of the British Education system; others may have been failed by or have failed to fully engage with the education system. Arguably the common denominator in such a non-homogenous group is the possible lack, or incomplete nature, of the skills infrastructure necessary for HE study. In acknowledgement of this the University has many support strategies in place including the existence of the Capability Curriculum, a skills component designed

to be taught to students as part of their normal programmes of study with the explicit goal of making students more 'employable'.

The support strategies, but not the implementation of the Capability Curriculum, are co-ordinated by the Learning and Language Development Co-ordinator, based in the Higher Education Access Development Centre (HEAD). Student support includes a whole raft of activities and resources including a Study Skills collection and Resource Based Learning materials, a drop-in Study Skills programme, various pre-academic year programmes, nine hours per week of drop-in study workshops and faculty-based support.

Further, individual faculties tend to have different skills initiatives running. Specifically, the ECSS has the accredited YC100 Study Skills module; Business and Science both have accredited subject skills modules; and the Faculty of Environmental and Social Sciences has a non-accredited Study Skills programme: writing and communication in higher education, that students can access either in WebCT mode or via direct tuition.

Attitudes to skills programmes

The HEAD Learning and Language Co-ordinator identifies 'two polarised camps' of opinion with respect to student support/skills based courses:

> One emphasising the importance of employability and the necessity for students to acquire specific skills laid down by employers, the other stressing the importance of individual freedom and development... (Peters, H 1998; 290)

Arguably there is also a third camp where subject tutors, probably in response to high student numbers and the pressure of large class sizes, demonstrate concern about the lack of subject knowledge in non-traditional students. Institutional and demographic factors can encourage the feeling that HE institutions have to take up too much of a Further Education (FE) role. Given the competition for time in terms of subject content and skills content, this can encourage the opinion that skills programmes are the province of FE and hence are redundant in the HE context.

Each of these views in their own way works against the institution of accredited skills modules. One is often repudiated as employer-centred, the other embodies the fear that such programmes work against the freedom of the student, initiating them unquestioningly into dominant discourses, the last because there is no place for such a course in an HE institution.

It is hoped that the YC100 module belongs to a fourth camp that acknowledges that a programme that is empowering in the sense of being for the students, to 'facilitate significant learning' (Rogers), so improves the quality of the student learning experience that future subject teaching becomes more successful. Ironically, it could also be argued that the skills that facilitate significant learning in HE would also facilitate lifelong learning and employability.

ECSS students

General

Students on the ECSS are mainly female. There is a high proportion of working class students, both white and from the ethnic minorities. There are many students whose mother tongue is not English, whether born in England or having moved to England at some point. Some students are refugees. Perhaps atypically, the majority of our students, whilst lacking in self-confidence and self-esteem, especially with respect to Higher Education, are highly motivated.

YC100 study

Of the five students who participated in this study, four defined themselves as working class, though one felt that being on the course did 'compromise' her class status. One did not define her class at all. One student was educated in Ireland and one in Portugal, the other three were educated in England. None of them 'saw' themselves as students; three made explicit mention of leaving secondary education feeling 'failures' or inferior.

Students' aims

Typically students identify a need for self-development and improvement as their reason for coming on the ECSS. Many state that they want to become teachers. Many are frustrated in their role at work; the mature students in particular, feeling blocked at the top of their professional ladder and pay scales as Nursery Nurses. Often this appears to progress to a desire to 'change things'; this progresses to a desire to become involved in education policy making.

That so many ECSS students express this desire to 'change things' perhaps indicates that they are being equipped to reassess educational discourses - and to situate themselves actively and powerfully within those discourses in practical and yet ideological ways.

Self perception

Typically students arriving on the ECSS, whilst acknowledging the supportive and welcoming nature of the staff, do not 'see' themselves as students and express deep fear and anxiety.

Bridging the gap

The purpose of the YC100 module is to build a relevant and useful skills infrastructure in participating students and hence to bridge the gap between the students' negative self-perceptions and their desire to succeed at University.

Further, by giving students a safe space to engage with theories pertaining to study, learning and communication, it is hoped not only to equip students for their current studies, but also to give them a framework with which to re-evaluate past educational experiences:

> And it opened up learning strategies, different strategies... And now I don't feel inferior ...When I viewed myself, when I came out of school, which wasn't very clever at all and I just viewed myself as a not very intelligent person really. (Interviewee, June 2000)

This positive transformation is quite common in YC100 students.

YC100

The programme

The YC100 module is designed to facilitate the quality of the learning experience of the ECSS students who have few or no formal academic qualifications. The course itself consists of ten, two and one half-hour sessions covering successful study strategies including organisation and time management, research and notemaking, memory and learning style, the theory and practice of presentations and essay writing and positive thinking. The premise of this Study Skills programme is that students, whether traditional or non-traditional, benefit from being taught how to learn, how to study and how to communicate effectively within academic conventions and discourses (q.v. Appendix A, Course Handbook).

Right from the start the study skills component of the ECSS has been accredited. This has been an important factor in terms of conferring status and relevance on a subject that many students automatically reject as either time consuming or irrelevant. This is especially pertinent on a part time degree where frequently poorly paid students are often paying for their own modules - and the course will take upwards of seven years to complete.

The potential negative is that instead of a one-year Access programme (another alternative route into HE); students have ten weeks to prepare themselves for delivering a University Level One piece of work.

Assessment

Assessment is based on a portfolio of student work including an essay, report or project, 1750 words, based on the course content. This is different to other skills programmes at the University where the exercises are subject-centred rather than learning theory centred. Our position is that reflection on learning theory and practice better prepares students for their roles as active learners.

Fifty per cent of marks are awarded for the skills elements of the portfolio: learning contract, weekly reviews, notes from written and spoken sources, essay and presentation plans and self assessment. In this way students are encouraged to become aware of the importance of these factors in their learning processes.

Fifty per cent of the marks are awarded for the written component. This acknowledges that students will have to become adept at managing formal, written academic conventions on the ECSS as a whole.

Students, who fail this or any assignment, are allowed to re-submit. They are heavily encouraged to take up tutorial support before they re-submit a piece of work.

YC100: The process

In the process of evaluating my own Study Skills practice I became aware that whilst I did teach a very practical programme - albeit with room for theory and reflection - there was an overarching shape to my course. I was implicitly teaching that there were six key components to successful study and that these were predicated on the following assumptions:

- Good students are made, not born

- Getting the overview, or the whole picture, is essential
- Creativity is vital, and it, too, can be taught
- Knowledge of academic forms or genres eases anxiety and promotes success
- Fear plays an enormous role and must be actively addressed
- Reflexivity is vital.

The six steps explained

Good students are made, not born: We believe that good study techniques and practices can be identified and then taught to students such that those students can become more successful. The skills that were taught on the YC100 programme include:

- organisation and time management
- targeted research strategies and active reading skills (SQR3)
- notemaking strategies
- self-motivation strategies, including the Learning Contract,
- as well as the various skills necessary for planning and preparing presentations and essays.

Getting the overview, or the whole picture, is essential: When students join college courses they join entities in the control of others. This can be very dis-empowering. At its worse it can mean that many students passively pass through a course rather than actively engage with it. This is more likely to be the case with the non-traditional student who already experiences a sense of low self-esteem with respect to education.

One way to overcome the passivity of students is to help them to gain an overview - the whole picture - of any course that they join. If students can get to grips with the aims, learning outcomes and assessment criteria of a course, they are in a position to see and appreciate its shape and purpose. This gives a meaningful context, which aids understanding and hence active learning.

Creativity is vital, and it, too, can be taught: When teaching notemaking strategies to Access students I encountered Tony Buzan's work on 'mindmapping', as a consequence I taught a creative notemaking system (key words in patterns) to students. As my Access students began to move on to University they reported back that this system was the biggest fundamental aid to their success. They said that they had the time to think when notemaking and that they made manageable and useable notes. Further they confirmed that they were more creatively and actively engaging in their studies.

It became apparent that creative notes helped successful study and, being lateral rather than linear in nature, they also facilitated creative thinking. Eventually I developed other creative learning strategies in my Study Skills programmes. I placed a special emphasis on brainstorming when preparing for essay writing. The brainstorm allows the free and uncensored flow of ideas for students. This has the potential to increase the breadth and depth of student learning.

Currently I also build in sessions on memory and learning style, which explore visual, auditory and kinaesthetic modes of learning. This, again, is liberating for the non-traditional student who may have 'failed' at school because their mode of learning was not congruent with the dominant mode of teaching.

Knowledge of academic forms or genres eases anxiety and promotes success: Would you ask someone to write a sonnet if they did not know what a sonnet was? Typically the answer to that question is no, and yet we as tutors regularly ask students to write essays, reports, projects, dissertations, briefing papers - or to deliver presentations and seminars. Perhaps we so take these forms for granted that we no longer see them as forms at all. The student, however, often has no idea at all about what these things are.

Unfamiliarity with the form can fill the student with fear and anxiety. Further, typically, students feel that because they have been asked to do these things, then they OUGHT to know what they are. This increases the fear and anxiety and further diminishes the self-esteem and self-confidence of the student involved. In this fearful context, the student cannot perform to their best ability. Thus a negative cycle gets set up which does not promote learning, further, as students frequently perform below their potential; it can also be very de-moralising and de-motivating.

On the YC100 we cover the presentation, the essay and, occasionally, the report. We also stress the structure of a typical paragraph - making sense of the component parts of that communication device. Whilst this might seem very prescriptive, what actually happens is that, with the increased confidence that this knowledge brings, the student feels free to adapt the conventions encountered rather than being subject to them.

Fear plays an enormous role and must be actively addressed: All the students that I have taught, traditional and non-traditional alike, and definitely all the YC100 students, talk of their fear and anxiety in the educational context. To address fear directly there is a session on positive thinking - we also dedicate a part of the Weekly Review or Learning Log to students' emotional reactions to specific learning activities. Thus negative emotions are addressed directly and students can begin to work to develop positive self-esteem in the academic environment. For many students self-confidence is now the most important thing that they feel that they have gained from the YC100 course (below).

Reflexivity is vital: Most educational theorists talk of the value of review. In YC100 students are required to write a Weekly Review, or Learning Log, after every taught session. Students are asked to consider each activity engaged with in a teaching session in terms of:

- What they did - a brief note to jog the memory
- Why - an analysis of the possible purpose and value of the activity
- Reaction - their own personal response to the activity
- Learned - a summary of what they feel they learned by doing the activity.

This system was devised from the Buzan notion of the revision cycle, that is, that instant revision increases learning both in quantity and quality. Indeed many students on the YC100 report that this was a valuable exercise without which they would not have understood what was going on - let alone remembered it.

Commentary on the process

When teaching the YC100 course now, I draw it to a close with a brief lecture on the six aspects of successful study, and how I think that we have engaged with them over the run of the course. This is an important **learning** activity in terms of review and

summary; it is also an important **study** skill, modelling to students how material delivered in one way across a course can be re-visited and re-interpreted.

YC100 - The Study

Aims

In the light of the resistance to skills based courses that exists in the University; in preparation for this conference; and to refine the YC100 module, a small study was undertaken to try to assess the real impact of the programme:

- Were the skills that were being taught perceived to be of value by the students themselves?
- Were they learned?
- And if so, did they make a difference?

Sampling

The ECSS was already under intense scrutiny at that time and hence I was happy to take an opportunistic rather than a random or representative sample of students in my study. Obviously such a strategy invites the possibility of only encountering students who have strong opinions on the topic; a possibility exacerbated by the fact that I was conducting student interviews myself. I was pleasantly surprised to receive one volunteer who had not taken the YC100 module and thought that she would give a useful counter perspective to those who might come forward because they had very strong views with respect to YC100.

Of the five students that participated in my study three had taken YC100, one had taken YC200 (a second level module entitled Learning and Communicating in HE {Academic Writing}, q.v. Appendix B, now defunct as an accredited module) and one had not taken any Study Skills modules at all.

Methodology

Students attending the evening courses received a letter requesting their participation in a Study Skills/Support based interview. Five respondents were secured. Four students were interviewed in June 2000 and the interviews were taped. The fifth student had to have an operation at the crucial time, she agreed to complete the interview questions as a questionnaire (q.v. Appendix C). The interviews were transcribed at the beginning of August.

Areas covered

There were six key areas covered in the interview and questionnaire, students were asked about the following:

- their goals as students
- their feelings with respect to study and about themselves as students
- their experiences of the ECSS
- their experiences of the Study Skills module and its impact
- their experiences of support generally
- their recommendations.

Student responses are collected and discussed below.

Findings

Goals

As indicated above, students had specific career orientated goals for themselves often coupled with a sense of frustration in their career paths being otherwise blocked. It is clear that the students felt that the course opened doorways into places from which they were previously excluded, especially with respect to learning. There was a sense of awe attached to being a student at the University and a sense that this conferred status.

- Sod this. I'm at the top of my scale, I'm earning less than half these people [teachers] are earning and I can't go any further
- I wanted to follow up, not just be a nursery nurse, I wanted more
- Because I wanted to be a teacher, I'm a nursery nurse at the moment and I wanted to be a teacher
- Bring myself up to speed and see if I had a brain
- I couldn't believe, you know, that I would ever go to University.

These goals did seem to mutate as students perceived the value of what they were learning. Many students reported that they felt changed by their experiences:

- I feel it's part of my life now
- You feel so special. You really feel marvellous. You think, gosh, I can be clever again. It's a good, a good feeling
- No, no. My reason is now for myself and to try and change things and if I can't change things to get out of it
- I wanted to do more. I want to have my ideas...I want to be on top
- It was very good for my confidence as well and also to tell you the truth anything I learn on the modules actually complements my work. So I take it back into the workplace.

Themselves as students

Becoming a student was a very emotionally charged activity for all the students. Whilst there was a sense of anticipation and excitement, the over-riding emotional experience was of fear and anxiety. Common words to describe initial experiences were:

- nervous,
- nerve racking,
- inadequate,
- frightened,
- terrified,
- het up,
- apprehensive:

- Why, why, why can't I just be happy going to work and going home?
- I was glad but scared. I thought you stupid idiot, why didn't you leave things as they were?

Fear is not just another state of mind. Fear and a lack of self-confidence have a real impact on the quality of the student learning experience:

- But that week when you done that SQR3 [a targeted research strategy] I hated that and I was really uncomfortable the whole lesson... I was so unsure and not confident...I thought I don't know what the hell she wants me to do. And you know

as soon as you're in that position you can't learn anything, you can't take anything in...And it was awful. It was horrible. I didn't like that at all. I found that really hard.

Most of the students that I interviewed undertook YC100 as their first module; one undertook YC200 to assist her with the transition from Level 1 to 2. These all confirmed that the module itself contributed to the change in their feelings about being a student:

- I don't feel that way about myself anymore. I feel quite confident now. I can go for most things, you know?
- But I felt the confidence enough to attempt it. Whereas maybe, if I hadn't done the study skills, I may've felt, oh no, this is too much for me, you know? But I felt ready for that...and I was really pleased
- I felt that I needed that space just to build the confidence up and to know that I was doing things right
- I think I have gained more confidence. To be able to speak in public... So I feel that confidence is the main thing.

Experiences of the ECSS

Student experiences of the ECSS were very positive. Overall students found both the other students and the tutors sympathetic, helpful and supportive. Occasionally students mentioned large classes, particularly where they felt that this meant that the tutor therefore did not have the time to give them any formative feedback over the duration of the course.

Typical student responses include:

- I am really enjoying the course. Really enjoying University. My mother's told the whole of Ireland that I'm at University
- She is brilliant, putting everything very clearly...she is always with a smiley face...everything looks so fun, and you are learning
- You are learning to the extent that it drives you crazy
- We can bounce ideas off each other in class
- I like the whole set up. It's very good, you know...It's been very well thought out...the way they take into consideration all the different types of learning styles, they adapt in the assignments so everyone can show, you know, and express their learning in different ways.

Experiences of the study skills module – did it make a difference?

Experience of Study Skills

Of the five students that participated in my study three had taken YC100, one had taken YC200 and one had not taken any Study Skills modules at all.

The three that had taken YC100 and the one that had taken YC200 were incredibly positive in their feedback and felt that they had gained enormously in terms of self-confidence and specific skills. The student who had not taken any Study Skills modules felt that she was doing 'all right' on the ECSS although she did feel uncertain with respect to 'analysis'.

It is interesting to note that students felt that their self-confidence had grown both in terms of the positive thinking session and via the gaining of skills that improved their ability to negotiate the academic conventions with which they had to engage.

In interview, particular mention was made of:

- organisation
- targeted research and reading strategies
- pattern notes
- presentation skills
- essay writing skills, including paragraph construction and
- positive thinking.

- I was thinking about all those books on the booklist. I was thinking I had to read every single one of those books and I didn't know how I was going to manage it... When you done that bit about the books... I found that very valuable
- Yeah because you was teaching us about the number of words per essay and how to use the books and where to get information from and your pattern notes
- I pay much more attention to the assessment criteria
- I think the presentations ... the books, the brainstorm and being positive
- I use mindmaps all the time on all modules and throughout my work
- [Study Skills] gives me the structure to go back to, to hold on to and work from there. Particularly useful when I feel I don't know anything!

Did it make a difference?

School has failed many YC100 students. One said that her teachers had told her to 'go away and get a job in a shop, you'll never amount to anything'. So, arguably, the change in student self-confidence alone would make such a programme worthwhile. However, typically, our students want to do well.

The Study Skills students in my study reported that their grades ranged from Cs to Bs to As. There were a high proportion of B grades and a high number of A grades. The student rejected by her school went on to receive A and B grades for her work on the ECSS, with A grades in the eighties. Students did feel that although 'it was [their] work' the study skills learned had contributed to their success.

Now some tutors say that the grades are not important, it is the learning that counts. But if they saw the frustration of really committed and industrious students as they failed a module or heard students speak of the joy that their 'good' grades brought them, they might change their minds:

- I'm really lucky; mostly it's made me feel up there. And it, and it – and you go, YES, and it really spurs you on.

Experiences of support generally

As mentioned above, UNL offers many different types of support to students and these are advertised in the ***Student Handbook***. However, most of the students were not aware of all the types of University support available to them. The student who had attended no Study Skills sessions was not aware of any of the support that was available to her.

Where students were aware of the support, most did not use it. Reasons of time and travel were cited, although one student thought that it was 'too formal sounding' for her. Many did not realise that they could get help with actual assignments in support sessions if they so wished.

Given student resistance to support coupled with the typical ECSS student's desire to do well, it is obviously our responsibility to address this issue proactively (below).

Student recommendations

As indicated above, students were very positive about the ECSS and YC100. Students felt that they were learning an enormous amount and they said that they fed this directly in to the workplace (bearing out the 'fourth camp' argument). Typically where students made recommendations about the programme, they made positive suggestions as to how there could be better communication, including more formative feedback, as this would enhance the quality of their learning experience.

In summary:

Students were very positive about the supportive nature of both the other students and the tutors. They expressed themselves aware that tutors offered tutorials and that they could book one to one time with them if they wished.

General recommendations with respect to ECSS dealt with formative feedback. Some wanted more indication on assignments of where they had gone wrong. Most wanted the opportunity to hand in small pieces of work in order to receive formative feedback. The students wanted to alleviate anxiety, which they thought stopped them from being able to think clearly. They wanted to know that they were on the 'right track'. Students did realise that high student numbers made this problematic on some modules.

Some students wanted more photocopies of useful texts; some wanted clearer indication of where library books could be found, perhaps even having a library induction session. Some wanted many more library books available as Early Years is a subject area subject to frequent change.

With respect to support generally, students thought more emphasis should be made of what is available, perhaps in the form of flyers or a dedicated pamphlet. (A current ECSS Newsletter is attempting to address this issue.)

Conclusion

The ECSS is designed to support diversity in Early Years by being an open entry, part time course that can be taken in direct tuition or distance learning mode. It meets a 'widening participation' brief by encouraging students into the Scheme that have little or no formal qualifications. The YC100 module is designed to enable non-traditional students to gain the necessary self-confidence and skills infrastructures with which to engage with HE study.

Institutional and demographic factors place enormous constraints on the subject tutor. Taken in conjunction with the various needs of the non-traditional student in terms of subject knowledge and the building of a skills infrastructure, there are several polarised camps of opinion as to the value and nature of skills based courses. There is debate as to whether these should be learning theory based, subject centred, employer directed – or whether, either because they run counter to the freedom of the student or because they are essentially FE in nature, they should exist at all.

The YC100 module was designed to be a programme that empowered students by building the self-confidence and the skills infrastructure that would facilitate significant learning. Students are taught time management, research and notemaking strategies and the various skills required in planning, preparing and delivering essays and presentations. It is argued that there is an overarching shape to this programme that emphasises study techniques, creativity, de-mystifying forms and processes, the affective dimension of the academic environment and the need for active and ongoing review.

Students report back that the YC100 course works to directly build their self-confidence and their study skills. They also note that the building of skills further increases their self-confidence. All of the students were becoming confident enough to adapt the strategies they learned to suit themselves. This even included quite prescriptive seeming information with respect to the academic essay and the academic paragraph.

Students adopted mature and thoughtful attitudes towards all the teaching and learning encountered on the ECSS both in terms of course content, which they fed back into their work, and in terms of the diversity of teaching and learning strategies, which they appreciated. Students did recommend the giving of more formative feedback in the course of modules to alleviate anxiety, and hence promote their learning.

The success of the YC100 is partly due to the high levels of motivation, commitment and enthusiasm that the students themselves bring to the programme. The Study Skills module is a joyful course to teach and ECSS is an inspiring programme of which to be a part.

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YC100 - Study Skills

Welcome
Welcome to this module. This is a module designed to help students get back into the swing of learning. It is designed to help you to learn how to learn, study and communicate effectively in H.E., and in the context of lifelong learning. We hope that you find this module useful, entertaining and stimulating.

Study Skills is designed to be a safe space to learn the 'what, why and how' of studying – to have a go – to make mistakes – and to learn from them. Enjoy!

Tutor: Sandra Sinfield

Aims:
- To introduce or reintroduce students to notions of learning, studying and communicating in Higher Education
- To give students a safe space to practise the skills and techniques that they will need to learn, study and communicate effectively

Learning Outcomes
By the end of this module students will have:
- An understanding of the need to make a commitment to their studies
- Organised themselves for study
- Explored notemaking from written and spoken sources
- Evolved effective notemaking strategies
- An understanding of the importance of planning – and engaged in planning presentations and writing
- Explored their personal learning styles and applied that to themselves as students
- Explored formal academic conventions – in particular the presentation, the essay and the report
- Engaged in the ongoing review of their learning
- Assessed their own progress with respect to study, learning and communication skills – and set new goals.

Recommended Reading:
Whilst we cover much ground in the taught sessions, no lesson or lecture is ever intended to give you 'all you need to know' on a subject. At this level everything you encounter is likely to seed further research rather than be an end in itself. With this in mind I have selected a very few texts to recommend to you. These have all proven useful to me and to other students like you. You will, however, choose just how many or few of them you eventually use.

"And reading fits in...where?"

Carl Rogers (1996) ***Freedom to learn***, Merrill
Rogers considers the facilitation of learning as the focus of education and teaching. An excellent text for all those who want to teach and/or to understand their own learning strategies.

Buzan (various dates) ***Use Your Head, The Mind Map Book***, BBC publications
The Buzan books are especially good for developing memory, speed-reading and notemaking. They help us learn how to use our minds! Recommended.

Andrew Northedge (1996) ***The Good Study Guide***, OU
A Study Skills text devised by an OU lecturer – some students regard it as THE Study Skills bible.

Susan Jeffers (1987) ***Feel the Fear and do it Anyway***, Century
A book about utilising a positive attitude rather than being defeated by a negative one – you've guessed it, another bible!

Sandra Sinfield (1999) ***The Work Smart Series***, Learning Curve Productions
A collection of student 'magazines' on Study Skills issues, covering things like study techniques, presentations, group work etc. User-friendly (promise). Kept as 'work packs' in the Writing and Communication Workshop area of the Learning Centre.

Writing and Communication Support
Being a student means that you have joined a 'community of learners', as such we here at the University of North London want you to make the most of all

the learning resources that we offer. One such resource would consist of all the support workshops offered here at the University.

General support for all students is offered in the Writing and Communication Workshops in the Learning Centre (see below).

Faculty based support will be available to you as HUMS students (you belong to the Faculty of Humanities and Teacher Education). Look out for the leaflets advertising this.

ECSS: Specific support is offered to you as Early Childhood Studies students. Look out for the leaflets advertising this.

Writing and Communication Workshops (WCW)
The WCWs run in the Study Skills area of the library, situated on the ground floor of the Learning Centre. This is the spot that houses the Study Skills Collection and the Study Skills Resources. It is staffed for drop-in workshops at the following times:
Tue, 1-2, 3-5
Wed, 1-4
Thur, 1-2, 5-7

Students that have used these workshops have found them invaluable – turning grades around and making studying easier.

Miss It – Miss Out!!

Assessment
Assessment for this course is in the form of a portfolio of Study Skills material including a formal piece of academic writing on a Study Skills issue.

Marks are divided equally between the Skills and the formal writing; though students must pass the writing element to move on.

The portfolio should be as follows:

- Lightweight cover
- No individual envelopes for pages
- Cover sheet (Room M.134)
- Learning contract
- Complete set of weekly reviews
- Example of smart notes from a spoken source
- Example of smart notes from a written source
- Plans: presentation; writing
- Self assessment
- Formal writing on Study Skills topic (options below).

YC100 Writing Assignment
The idea of any assessment assignment is to get you thinking about and using that which you have learned over your course of study. Our assessment is no different.

There are three different assignment options below, an essay, a report or a project – you only have to do **one** – **word limit 1750 words**.

To get the most from doing the assignment you should choose the topic that most interests you.

Essay option:
Identify the structure and purpose of an academic essay and then answer one of the following questions.

(1) Describe and discuss one or more of your learning experiences on the Study Skills module that you think will be of value to you as a student.
(2) 'In the end all learning is active learning.' Discuss with particular reference to the Study Skills module.
(3) 'Being a successful student depends as much on dealing with our feelings as with developing good study techniques.' Discuss.
(4) Using your Weekly Reviews as source material, consider how the Study Skills module has prepared you for 'lifelong learning'.

Report option:
Identify the structure and purpose of a report and use that information to help you structure a personal learning evaluation.

Choose one or more elements of your own learning/studying/communicating practice. Analyse your proficiency and make recommendations as to your continued development.

You may wish to refer to your proficiency on entering the Study Skills module and your proficiency as it now stands.
E.g.1: a formal report evaluating your academic writing strategies.
E.g. 2: a formal report investigating your memory techniques.

Project option:
Identify the structure and purpose of a project and choose one of the following:

(1) Choose one or more elements from the Study Skills programme to put into practice with the children in your care. You must develop a sound rationale (reason and purpose) for your choice in terms of aims, learning outcomes, teaching and learning styles, relevance. Evaluate the effect of your intervention on the children; make recommendations for extension activities where appropriate.

(2) Develop a project title of your own. This must draw heavily on the aims and outcomes of this module. You must okay the title with me at least three weeks before the end of the course.

General Programme

One: Course overview. Introductions. Good and bad learning. Learning contract. Weekly review.

Two: Notemaking: brainstorm, smart notes, practice lecture. Organisation and time management.

Three: Targeted research (SQR3): why do we need a system? Where should we start? SQR3 explained. SQR3 theory into practice.

Four: Library visit and induction (date to be confirmed with librarian).

Five: Presentations: what, why, how. Positive thinking in the academic environment.

Six: Student presentations. Group building (time permitting).

Seven: Academic writing: why, what (essay and report), how. Essay groups.

Eight: Memory and learning style. Group work on presentations.

Nine: Group presentations. Feedback. Writing exercise.

Ten: Putting it all together: six steps to success. Self-assessment notes. Course evaluation. Essay tutorials.

Things that other students have said

"This was absolutely the most important piece of learning that I have ever done."

"The study Skills course had been of enormous value to me. It is a course that sets students up to succeed."

"This course is at the forefront of maximising our potential as students."

YC200 – Learning and communicating in H.E. (Academic Writing)

Aims:

- To revisit the key factors that influence teaching and learning
- To examine the role of student writing in the learning process
- To develop student understanding of the characteristics of, and variety in, academic writing
- To develop notions of academic discourse with a special reference to ECSS
- To develop student academic research and reading skills
- To develop student communication skills with a special emphasis on writing.

Learning outcomes

On completion of this module students should have:

- Explored factors that facilitate effective teaching and learning
- Re-visited key study skills covered in module YC100
- Examined the role of student writing in the learning process
- Developed notions of academic discourse
- Considered the range of information sources available in Education Studies – paper-based and electronic
- Developed an understanding that academic writing builds on and generally refers to previous academic writing
- Explored referencing skills and understood the concept of plagiarism
- Developed their own research, reading and notemaking skills
- Developed their academic communication skills – both oral and written.

Capability Curriculum:

Core:
C5 – communicate effectively in context
C6 – seek, handle and interpret information

Subsidiary:
C3 – think critically and produce solutions

Assessment

Assessment will be threefold; marks will be awarded as follows:

- 25% for the completion of a research file cum learning diary
- 25% for an oral presentation (poster presentation or seminar)
- 50% for the write up of student initiated research into some aspect of teaching and learning covered on the course. This can be either as applied to children or to the mature student – and can be presented as an essay, a report or an article. The student must clearly indicate and give reasons for their choice and adhere to the appropriate convention.

Research points

Students will be supplied with some handouts to seed exploratory thinking. There is no specific reading list, but the following authors are all useful and students will be expected to perform library and Internet searches around several of the following:

Bakhtin – speech genres
Beck, Giddens and Lash – reflexive institutions
Bourdieu – academic institutions
Buzan – creative learning techniques
Foucault – discourse theory
Gibbs – effective teaching and learning strategies (H.E.)
Rogers – the facilitation of significant learning.

Teaching and learning strategies

Staff and student led seminars and communication workshops.

Programme

The programme is flexible and subject to amendment in the light of student interest and needs. A rough programme could be:

(1) Gaining an overview of the course including the research points and assessment requirements. Consideration of key factors that affect teaching and learning. Deciding on the Study Skills to be covered (tutor led seminars) and the student research points (student led seminars).
(2) Review notemaking practice, research strategies and organisation and time management techniques.
(3) Review student writing: What do you like about your writing at the moment? What do you dislike? Writing for H.E. – quality and conventions (essay, report, article, other).
(4) Review oral communication skills – presentation and seminar.
(5) In search of evidence.
(6) In search of evidence.
(7) Student seminars
(8) Student seminars
(9) Feedback and preparation for assessed writing.
(10) Course review and evaluation. Final preparation for assessed writing.

Possible supplementary activities:

- Analysing ECSS assignment requirements – generally and specifically
- 'Marking' sample essays
- Exploring the theory and practice of Group Work
- Re-visiting memory and learning style.

Retroactive study: (SS1) YC100 Study Skills module, ECSS, UNL.

Sandra Sinfield, acting Learning and Language Co-ordinator, HEAD

Required Information:

Name

Address

Tel no

E-mail

Age

Gender

Social Class

Ethnic group

English as mother tongue/additional language

Previous educational experience

Took SS module When

Did not take SS module Why not

When did you join the ECS Scheme?

At what level did you enter the Scheme?

What level are you on now? 1st 2nd 3rd Other Withdrawn

How many modules have you completed to date?

General Statement

As you know we are interviewing students at the moment with respect to their experiences on the Early Childhood Studies Scheme for the EECERA Conference at the Institute of Education, September.

The focus is on supporting diversity in Early Years Study – and my angle is to cover the various forms of support offered to students by the University.

These interviews are confidential and you can be as honest as you wish in your responses.

For my interviews I will be asking students to reflect on their feelings over various periods of the course. This will mean casting your mind right back to before you started the course – and trying to remember your feelings at different stages of the course. You do not need to remember 'right' straight away, and to cover for this I will repeat some of the questions.

This is not a test of any sort – and there really are no 'right' answers – I am interested in your real answers.

Setting the Scene

So – could you think back to right before you started the Scheme...?

How did you find out about the scheme?

Why did you want to do the course/join the Scheme?

How did you feel when you applied for a place?

How did you feel when you received an offer of a place?

How did you feel when you turned up for your very first module?

How would you describe your experience of your first few modules?

Was there anything that made you particularly anxious?

Was there anything that you particularly liked or enjoyed?

Is there anything that we could have done to improve your initial experiences?

Support Questions

Now I'd like to move on to examining the University's efforts with respect to student support – and how supported you have felt/you feel as a student.

Do you feel supported?
Do you want to say anything about that?
The Study Skills module was intended to be supportive – did you do it? If yes, continue – if no go straight to Q.15.
Where did it come in your 'run' of modules?
Was this a good placing or not?
Could you say why?
How did you feel coming to the first SS session?
Could you try to remember how you saw yourself as a student – or as a learner – before you did the SS module?
Can you remember how you felt as a student/learner immediately after completing the SS module?
And how do you view yourself as a student/learner now?
Was there anything that you particularly liked about the SS module?
On thinking it about it now, is there anything that you would change about the module?
Is there anything that you would add to or take out of the module? (Why?)
What, if anything, do you think you learned on the SS module?
Could you comment on your study/learning/communicating techniques? (If applicable, have they been affected by the SS module?) Prompts:
Organisation and time management
Notemaking research
Presentations
Writing
Essays
Reports

Group work

Learning style

Positive thinking

Motivation

Being a student

Being a learner

Being an undergraduate

Studying on other modules

The project

Other

Did you understand what was required from you on the SS module?

If the module did not help – can you say why not?

If you want to – could you tell me what grades you are getting now?

Do you understand what is required from you on the other modules?

Do you feel that you are 'learning' on the other modules?

Can you say anything about that?

Other Support

I would now like to move on to consider other support offered to students by the University.

Were you aware that the University offered other support? (ECSS based, faculty-based, WCW, Dyslexia, Disability Unit)
Have you used any of this other support? If no, go to Q.6.
If so – which?
Have you found it useful?
If so, why/how? If not useful, could you say why/how?
Could you say why you have not used any other support?
Now I'd like to return to a question that I asked you earlier – do you feel supported at the University?
Do you feel supported within the ECS Scheme?
Is there any support that you have had with respect to module work or assignments?
Could you say something about that?
Is there any support that you would like to have had? Could you say something about that? Prompts:
Support with assignments
Different types of feedback
Tutorials
Making the transition across levels

Closing Remarks

Well, I've asked a lot of questions – and structured this debate quite tightly.., thank you for bearing with me, just a few more questions and we have finished:

I asked you at the beginning why you joined the ECSS:
Could you remind me of your reasons for joining the Scheme?
Are these still your reasons for being with the Scheme?
If your reasons have changed, could you say what they are now – and why they have changed?
Has the Scheme lived up to your expectations?
Could you say something about that?
Has the Scheme disappointed you in any way?
Could you say something about that?
What, if anything, do you feel that you have gained from being on the Scheme?
Is there anything that you feel that I have left out?
Is there anything that you'd like to add?
Is there anything that you'd like to say?

Many thanks for all your time and help!